

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: My Aurora Budget Speech

By Stephen Somerville

The Federal

Minister of Finance, the Honourable Bill Morneau gave his Budget Speech a few weeks ago and his Ontario Counterpart, the Honourable Vic Fideli, followed last week.

For those

who have been loyal readers of this column, you will know that your friendly scribe has pontificated on the budget process, the roles and responsibilities of the various levels of government and the trending of our taxes against various metrics in the past.

I present

below, for the readers' perusal, amusement and probable ridicule, my own hypothetical Aurora Municipal Budget Speech.

I will have

you know that, due to the solemnity of the occasion, I have put on my best blue suit, white shirt (with blue stripes) and a blue tie. And I am wearing a pair of black Italian loafers that have gold buckles. (Due to self-imposed austerity measures ? i.e. my wife would not be too pleased - I have refrained from the budget making tradition of buying a new pair of shoes). I then affixed a yellow and white carnation to my suit jacket lapel.

Sitting in

the Council Chamber, I would have a sip of water, then at 4:35 p.m. - just after the financial markets have closed so as not to unduly alarm world markets ? I would rise from my seat.

My Budget

Speech would go something like this:

Mr. Mayor, Councillors, ladies and gentlemen, friends,
assembled guests ? and my father-in-law, good afternoon!

It gives me a tremendous amount of pride and

satisfaction to rise from my seat in this great rotunda of thought and grand debate to deliver, on behalf of the Mayor and his Council colleagues, my first Budget as Aurora's Minister of Finance.

I would like to first thank the citizens of this community

for their active involvement in our special budget consultation meetings held earlier this year. As part of the budget process, Council was looking for suggestions on how to increase non-tax revenues and how to save money on Town processes and services. Your ideas were most welcome and many of them have been incorporated into today's Budget.

This Budget is about four P's.

It is about Perspective. It is about Prudence. It is about Priorities. But it is mostly about People.

Perspective: Aurora is the fifth largest of the municipalities within York Region and growing at an enormous rate. So too is our Town's growing appetite for services and capital projects.

The Town annual operating budget is approximately \$67.5 Million.

The Town is responsible for things such as local roads, fire protection, garbage collection, snow ploughing, traffic control, Library, Seniors' Centre, recreation facilities and local land use planning needs.

Prudence & Priorities: The Mayor and his six Council colleagues have been painstakingly going through the budget items ? one at a time.

As this is the first Budget that our new team is bringing forward, we want to send a message of focus and also to set a tone.

From our discussions with Aurora residents, there is widespread concern about our aging infrastructure. A significant proportion of your tax dollars will go toward repairing roads and sidewalks.

We have an ambitious ten-year capital plan to spend \$286 Million - representing 519 capital projects. 356 of these projects are for repairs and replacements, 99 are for growth and new projects and 64 are related to studies and other projects.

People: Our community is what we make of it. What we want is to have a Town where every individual can enjoy the activities and programs that our community has to offer.

We know that there are a number of children in our community that would love to play hockey, baseball or soccer but their families cannot afford the annual fees.

Therefore, we are setting aside \$150,000 every year to be used so that children, under the age of 19, can have access to community sports groups.

To encourage people in our community to vote we are also setting aside \$30,000 for election prizes. All those who actually cast a vote in municipal, provincial and federal elections will be eligible. Four draws of \$2,500 each will be done after every election.

Finally, our Council also believes in accountability. To this end the following Ways and Means Motion will be tabled in this chamber this afternoon.

Be it resolved that Council will direct Town Staff to produce a quarterly or semi-annual scorecard or specific update for the citizens of Aurora that will be published in the local newspaper so the citizens can monitor the progress on these agreed upon Budget Priorities.

The 2019 Aurora Budget document is understandable, it is prudent and it lays out our priorities for the next four years. But above all, this Budget is about people and how we can, together, make a safer, happier, healthier and better Aurora.

Thank You.